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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 000843

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TAGS: PGOV TW

SUBJECT: KAOHSIUNG PARTY LEADERS ON UPCOMING LEGISLATIVE  
AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Classified By: AIT Deputy Director Robert S. Wang.  
Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Kaohsiung DPP and KMT leaders recently told AIT that the ruling DPP has boosted its support since coming to power in 2000 by directing resources and attention to Kaohsiung City, reversing the historical neglect of the south by the previous KMT central government. KMT Legislator Lo Shih-hsiung suggested that likely presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou is one of the few Mainlander politicians who can cross the "ethnic divide" and appeal to Taiwanese voters. Local DPP leaders stressed the importance of uniting the party behind its presidential candidate after the current intense primary process is completed. Kaohsiung City will have five seats in the new Legislative Yuan (LY) to be elected in late 2007 or early 2008. At this early stage, local KMT leaders hope to win two or three seats, while the DPP hopes to win three or four seats in this DPP heartland city. End Summary.

¶2. (C) During a visit to Kaohsiung City on March 20, AIT/T POL Chief and Deputy Chief, accompanied by AIT/K, discussed local politics and upcoming legislative and presidential elections with KMT City Chairman HSU Fu-ming, KMT Legislator LO Shih-hsiung, DPP City Chairman CHANG Chih-ming, Kaohsiung City Military Service Office Director CHAO Wen-nan (DPP), and Frank Hsieh Workshop Director HSU Jen-tu (DPP). From these discussions, it was clear that pan-Green and pan-Blue supporters are now relatively evenly divided in Kaohsiung City, a situation reflected in the razor-thin margin of victory by the DPP's Chen Chu in the December 2006 mayoral election.

¶3. (C) DPP leaders accused, and KMT leaders acknowledged, the pre-2000 KMT central government had neglected Kaohsiung and other areas in southern Taiwan. According to DPP City Chairman Chang, the KMT had focused largely on Taipei, Taiwan's political and business center, while ignoring problems such as pollution in the port and industrial center of Kaohsiung. Since coming to power in 2000, the DPP has bolstered support for the party in Kaohsiung by devoting greater attention and resources to the city. City official Chao stressed the importance of the south to DPP election strategy since the party relies on surplus votes from southern Taiwan to make up for shortfalls in the north.

¶4. (C) KMT and DPP interlocutors agreed that Taiwanese identity is an important factor in southern Taiwan. KMT City Chairman Hsu told AIT that his party's supporters hoped their probable presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou, a Mainlander, would spend more time in southern Taiwan to better understand the thoughts and views of local Taiwanese people. Only by doing so could the KMT narrow the gap with the DPP in the south, Hsu suggested. KMT Legislator Lo maintained that Ma Ying-jeou is one of the few Mainlanders who can cross the "ethnic (or provincial) divide" and appeal to Taiwanese voters. Legislative Yuan (LY) Speaker Wang Jin-pyng, a native Taiwanese, has hurt himself politically by attacking Ma on the ethnic issue, Lo argued. Lo believed Ma may have learned something from criticisms of his campaign style during the Kaohsiung mayoral election: just shaking hands is not enough to win votes; it is important to sit down, drink tea, and establish a relationship with supporters. If Ma is convicted in his ongoing corruption trial, Lo suggested that might actually help Ma during the campaign, as the KMT can mobilize supporters who believe in Ma's innocence. Lo recommended that Ma select as his vice presidential running mate a woman from the south with a clean image, such as aborigine legislator Chang Jen-hsiang from Taitung.

¶5. (C) Local DPP leaders expressed concern about infighting among the four candidates competing for the DPP presidential nomination, with DPP City Chairman Chang observing that "the most terrifying enemies are from your own party, because they know you better." Nonetheless, Chang and other DPP interlocutors predicted that DPP will follow tradition and become strongly united after the primary battle, which will

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be key to the party's efforts in the 2008 presidential campaign. All three DPP contacts doubted that Frank Hsieh and Premier Su Tseng-chang would be able to join each other on a single ticket, though Hsieh-supporter Hsu Jen-tu said their polling showed that a Hsieh-Su ticket would beat Ma Ying-jeou by seven percentage points. Hsu suggested that former acting Kaohsiung Mayor Yeh Chu-lan, a Hakka woman, would be an ideal running mate for Hsieh, and Chang Chih-ming separately suggested Yeh Chu-lan would be a good vice presidential candidate for the DPP.

Legislative Elections

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¶6. (C) Kaohsiung City will have 5 of the total 73 district seats in the new LY to be elected in December 2007 or January 2008. Two KMT leaders predicted their party will win 2-3 of the city's 5 Legislative Yuan (LY) seats in December. One DPP leader predicted a 4-1 advantage for his party, while the local DPP party chief suggested that, while a DPP sweep is possible, a more likely result will be a 3-2 win for the DPP. While Kaohsiung City currently has 11 legislators -- 5 DPP, 2 KMT, 2 FFP, and 2 TSU -- most contacts did not expect the small parties -- TSU and PFP -- to win any seats in Kaohsiung City in December.

¶7. (C) According to AIT's KMT and DPP interlocutors, the current situation in the five Kaohsiung City election districts is as follows:

-- District 1: This district, which includes the Tsoying Naval Base, has many Mainlander residents and is the most heavily pan-Blue district in Kaohsiung. Mainlander support has been gradually shifting from PFP to KMT. KMT at-large legislator Huang Chao-shun, a legislator since 1992 and a member of the KMT Central Standing Committee, is likely to win in this district. She originally planned to run in the 2006 Kaohsiung mayoral election, but lost the KMT primary to Huang Chun-ying. PFP legislator Chang Hsien-yao, Director of the PFP Policy Research Center, is also from this district.

Despite his prominence in Taipei politics, Chang is unlikely to win because he does not spend time working his constituency in Kaohsiung. The DPP sees a realistic possibility to win here only if two pan-Blue candidates split the pan-Blue vote.

-- District 2: Close, with a slight advantage to the pan-Green. The two major candidates are expected to be DPP Legislator Kuan Bi-ling, a close protege of Frank Hsieh, and KMT Legislator Lo Shih-hsiung, who is young, has a clean image, and appeals to women and swing voters. TSU legislator Tseng Tsan-teng is not a strong candidate.

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-- District 3: The DPP won this district by about 3,000 votes in the 2006 mayoral election. DPP Legislator Lee Kun-tze, a nephew of Mayor Chen Chu, has a good reputation and is favored to win. DPP Legislator Lin Chin-hsing, who is controversial because of medical insurance fraud allegations against the hospital he owns, has also registered for the party primary in this district. On the KMT side, at-large Legislator Ho Tsai-feng, who has strong grassroots support and is a member of the KMT Central Standing Committee, has a chance of winning this district.

-- District 4: The KMT, which took this district by 2,000 votes in the 2006 mayoral election, is likely to win. KMT Legislator Lee Fu-hsing is a candidate. KMT Legislator Chiu Yi, famous for sensational revelations and corruption charges against President Chen and those close to him, was favored, but had to pull out of the race after his conviction for ramming a truck into a government office gate during a protest after the party's March 2004 presidential loss. Most contacts do not expect TSU legislator Lo Chih-ming to do well, following his dismal performance in the 2006 Kaohsiung mayoral election. Legislator Huang Chao-hui and former government spokesman Yao Wen-chih are competing for the DPP nomination.

-- District 5: The DPP has a strong majority in this district, and incumbent DPP legislator Kuo Wen-chen is likely

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to win.

Comment

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18. (C) While southern Taiwan is generally viewed as the Green heartland, Green and Blue supporters are virtually evenly matched in Kaohsiung City. The highly competitive politics in Kaohsiung City are similar to those at the central level in Taipei and distinct from the more relaxed, less polarized atmosphere in some of Taiwan's smaller cities and rural areas. The developing trends in Kaohsiung over the next year in the legislative and presidential races will provide an important gauge for overall trends in Taiwan.

19. (U) This cable is a joint product of AIT/T and AIT/K.  
YOUNG